



U. S. Department of the Interior

U. S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Kenai National Wildlife Refuge

P.O. Box 2139
Soldotna, AK 99669
(907) 262-7021
FAX (907)262-3599

July 20, 2004

Good Day,

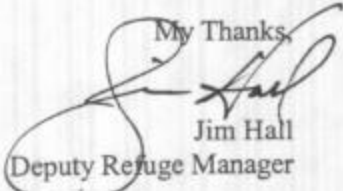
The Kenai National Wildlife Refuge announces that the Kenai NWR Cabin Management Plan was finalized, effective May 27, 2004. The Preferred Alternative (Alternative C) was selected, based on public and Service comments received during the comment period. All affected cabins will be posted this summer, informing the public as to the specific changes for each cabin located on the Refuge. A reservation system will go into effect for select public use cabins in 2005, which will be administered by the Kenai NWR, with two cabins remaining "first-come-first-served".

Cabins and Management Types Under the 2004 Cabin Management Plan

First-Come-First-Serve	Reservation	New Cabins (Reservation)
Emma Lake Cabin Trapper Joe Cabin	Vogel Lake Cabin Nurses Cabin Caribou Island Cabin Doroshin Bay Cabin Pipe Creek Cabin	Upper Ohmer Lake Cabin Snag Lake Cabin McLain Lake Cabin

New cabins constructed in 2004 will be placed under the new reservation system in 2005, and up to three additional public use cabins may be constructed in the future for reservation.

The final Kenai NWR Cabin Management Plan is available to those interested at the Kenai NWR Headquarters (please call 262-7021). Any questions reference cabins on the Kenai NWR may be directed to the Kenai NWR Cabin Manager, Gary Titus at 262-7021.

My Thanks,

Jim Hall
Deputy Refuge Manager



Kenai National Wildlife Refuge



Cabin Management Plan And Final Environmental Assessment

May 25, 2004

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Cover Photo:

Pipe Creek Cabin on Lake Tustumena.

ABSTRACT

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) prepared an Environmental Assessment (EA) to review the various alternatives available to establish a cabin management program for the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge (Kenai NWR), and to determine what form that management program will take in the future. The public was consulted initially with a questionnaire in May of 2003. Additional public comments were captured during the scoping phase of the Kenai Comprehensive Conservation Plan, and through a scoping newsletter mailed in the fall of 2003. A 30-day comment period on the draft cabin management plan ran from April 1, 2004 until April 30, 2004, and input received was used to help determine the selected alternative. The alternatives listed in the draft plan were:

1. **Alternative A** (Status Quo) – Refuge cabin management program will remain essentially unchanged from the past.
2. **Alternative B** – A public use permit and reservation system will be implemented, and the seven current public use cabins (See Table 1, or Appendix B) will be placed under a permit/reservation system. No new cabins will be constructed.
3. **Alternative C** - A public use permit and reservation system will be implemented, and some current public use cabins will be placed under a permit/reservation system, while other existing cabins will remain available on a first-come-first served basis. Additionally, up to six new cabins may be constructed and made available for public use via a permit/reservation system.
4. **Alternative D** - Public use cabins on the Refuge will be eliminated.

The Alternative selected for implementation is a slightly modified Alternative C. Some changes were made based on public comment on the draft plan; probable budgetary constraints; and other wildlife, wilderness, public use, and safety considerations.

SECTION I: PURPOSE AND NEED FOR ACTION

Purpose for Taking Action

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) was tasked by Congress in Fiscal Year (FY) 2003 to explore the feasibility of implementing a cabin management strategy and management plan for cabins within the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge (Kenai NWR). Language associated with the appropriation was specifically to “Establish a cabin management program on the Kenai NWR”. As part of the planning process FWS evaluated:

1. The current management strategy for existing administrative and public use cabins.
2. The establishments of additional administrative and public use cabins.
3. The benefit of initiating a reservation system for all or a portion of the existing and any new public use cabins
4. Management of trespass structures, historical structures and historical ruins.
5. Fire management concerns reference all existing structures (including known ruins) located on the Refuge.
6. Impacts on fish, wildlife and habitat.
7. Wilderness concerns.

The evaluation and proposed management of cabins and associated structures was examined in the overall context of Kenai NWR purposes, (including the protection of fish and wildlife populations and habitat, and providing for wildlife oriented recreation opportunities), complying with historic preservation mandates, and the appropriate administration of Kenai NWR designated Wilderness.

Need for Taking Action

Overnight stays on Kenai NWR including the use of numerous campgrounds and access areas, as well as dispersed backcountry camping, have been authorized by nationwide or Refuge specific regulations since the establishment of the Kenai National Moose Range (Executive Order 8979 on December 16, 1941). When common use of Refuge lands was replaced by the early Refuge Master Plans, and the later Outdoor Recreation Management Plans of 1971, and 1976, managers acknowledged that many Refuge users needed to stay overnight and in many instances for multiple days. To accommodate visitors, Refuge specific regulations allowed for a 14 day (maximum) overnight stay for generalized camping.

Early users of land that would later become the Kenai National Moose Range occasionally built shelters or cabins to accommodate their use. Many of the existing Refuge cabin structures and cabin ruins are postcards of an earlier era of use when explorers, trappers, hunters, homesteaders, and miners temporarily occupied various areas of the Kenai Peninsula. Other structures were built later for management purposes or in trespass. Initial visitor use of Refuge cabins originated as an opportunistic use of these abandoned shelters as alternatives to tent camping, particularly in the late fall and winter months. Many of the same attributes such as accessibility, abundant wildlife, lakeshore safe harbor, and proximity to water were the primary draw. Much of the

current remote access use is similar in that visitors who are otherwise prepared for overnight camping, but who opportunistically use a cabin on a first-come-first-served basis use many cabins. Many existing cabins have also become popular day use stopping points or historical viewing destinations by visitors. Short day visits observing the older structures, examining early woodcraft, reading the visitor logs, or seeking temporary shelter, appear to be more common than overnight use. While originally built for other purposes, cabins are now used increasingly for general recreation.

In a 1992 survey regarding Alaskans' outdoor recreation activities and preferences, 81 percent of the respondents supported certain aspects of the development and improvement of public use cabins. On the Kenai Peninsula, the U.S. Forest Service, National Park Service, Alaska State Parks and the Kenai NWR, currently provide 35 recreation cabins, with seven recognized public use cabins being available on the Refuge. The following seven cabins were available for public use in 2003, on a first-come-first-served basis with a handout detailing location, etc. available to the public from the Refuge office:

Cabins Available for Public Use on the Kenai NWR in 2003

Caribou Island Cabin – Tustumena Lake
Doroshin Bay Cabin – Skilak Lake
Emma Lake Cabin – Tustumena Lake
Nurses Cabin - Tustumena Lake
Pipe Creek Cabin - Tustumena Lake
Trapper Joe Cabin – Trapper Joe Lake
Vogel Lake Cabin – Vogel Lake

The Kenai NWR public use cabin program was the only visitor use cabin program in 2003 that was available without user fees, permits or advance reservations in south-central Alaska. In many ways the first-come-first-serve Kenai NWR cabins remain opportunistically available to remote travelers much in the same way they have since their initial construction and abandonment. Kenai NWR specific regulations now limit overnight stay to seven nights while using a public use cabin. All other agency-managed cabins found locally outside the refuge are currently managed on a reservation and fee basis, and include mostly agency-constructed structures, and a few older, renovated structures.

A recurring theme of public comments, internal management discussions, and Kenai NWR use planning has been whether or not to establish a more formal cabin management program. Cabin regulations (50 CFR 36.33) authorize, but do not require, the short-term recreational use and/or the establishment of a public use allocation system. As a result of the formal procedures conducted through the creation of this EA, this cabin management plan has been created.

Decision

This plan states common management direction and the selected alternative strategy for future management of cabins available for public use. Any new cabin program must conform to

statewide Refuge regulations for cabin management and be compatible with Refuge purposes. Public input was sought to help answer several of the above questions and determine how management actions would proceed. In order to properly evaluate alternative management programs it was important to understand the setting and background leading to the existing situation. A descriptive history of Refuge cabin management is included in Appendix A.

Alternative C will be implemented as follows:

Public Use - Reservation Cabins:

Up to six new cabins will be constructed in non-Wilderness areas, at times replacing existing commercial tent camps, with three scheduled for construction in 2004. Three additional existing cabins will be replaced, and relocated to adjacent drier, more compatible, locations. All of the above will be placed under the reservation system, which will be administered by Refuge staff, from the Refuge office. Once a management decision has been reached, it is possible that the Renfrew (Lindgren-Darien) cabin will also be placed under the reservation system. Five of the seven existing public use cabins will also be placed under the reservation system, and will include the following: Pipe Creek cabin, Vogel Lake cabin, Nurses cabin, Caribou Island cabin and Doroshin Bay cabin.

Public Use – “First-Come-First-Serve” Cabins:

Two of the seven existing public use cabins will continue to be administered as Public Use – “First-Come-First-Serve” cabins. They will receive more attention than in the past in terms of maintenance and law enforcement patrols. Registration will be required of cabin users (on-site), where the user will be required to sign-in at a register located in the cabin upon arrival at the site. This will help assure compliance with Refuge regulations, including the seven-day length-of-stay requirements.

Administrative – Interpretative Cabins:

These structures will be managed for their historical benefits, will be interpreted on-site, and will be for day-use only. No overnight stays will be allowed, except in emergencies. Four (perhaps five) older cabins will be managed in this fashion.

Issues Raised During Project Planning and Public Scoping

In May 2003, a questionnaire announcing the development of a cabin management plan was distributed to south-central Alaska newspapers for publication and interested persons (Appendix C). Twenty-three responses were received. Fourteen respondents had stayed in Refuge cabins. Sixteen expressed that there were too few cabins, while six said the number available was “about right”. One respondent believed there were too many cabins. Eighteen respondents expressed that a reservation system would be preferable while five did not want a reservation program. Seven persons thought any cabin management program should be administered by Refuge staff

and nine preferred a concessionaire to manage the program. One respondent stated that the Kenai NWR is not a State or Federal Park and should focus on wildlife not recreation. Several others expressed the need for a reservation system and the ability to count on the availability of a cabin. Yet another respondent noted that if they wanted to reserve a cabin, the neighboring Chugach National Forest had cabins available by reservation; the spur of the moment availability of cabins on the Refuge was important to this user.

Public scoping comments helped generate the preferred alternative in the draft EA. The final EA includes changes adopted after a 30-day public comment period of the draft EA and the draft compatibility determination (See Appendix E for the compatibility determination).

In addition to specific scoping comments solicited from the public, over 3,000 issue workbooks were mailed to a wide mailing list as part of the Refuge's CCP planning process. The following represents the responses received back on cabin management as part of the scoping effort.

Facilities Evaluation From the Issues Workbook (Complied 4/1/04)

	Does not meet my needs (% of responses)	Is sufficient for my needs (% of responses)	More than meets my needs (% of responses)
Availability of public use cabins	28	42	30

Comments received during the 30-day open comment period on the Draft EA for Cabin Management showed no strong concerns; however, the majority of the responses preferred a "first-come-first-serve" type of management program for existing cabins.

SECTION II: THE SELECTED ALTERNATIVE

Common Management Direction

All Kenai NWR cabins will be subject to federal regulations and policies associated with the general management of structures for public use on National Wildlife Refuges in Alaska. All cabins will also be subject to the requirements of federal regulations associated with historical preservation, documentation and research.

Consistent with regulations, currently usable cabins will be classified as either "public use" or "administrative" cabins. The Refuge considers cabins to be "ruins" if they have deteriorated to the point that they are no longer useful as a shelter, nor easily restored to near original condition. All cabins located on the Kenai NWR will be classified as "public use", "administrative" or "ruins". How these categories are to be managed, and which structures generally are recommended to be in each category are listed in Section IV of this EA. Following is a more comprehensive discussion of the Refuge cabin management objectives and classifications.

Cabin Management Objectives (In priority order)

1. Provide, in a manner compatible with Refuge purposes, public use and enjoyment of Refuge cabins, while ensuring public safety.
2. Construct and maintain any new administrative or public use cabin that is determined to be necessary for enhanced management needs, public safety, or otherwise in support of Refuge purposes.
3. Identify, relocate and/or remove unauthorized trespass or other structures that pose a hazard to public safety or wildlife conservation.
4. Protect and preserve the designated historical cabin ruin sites consistent with appropriate laws, rules, regulations, and research and study.
5. Provide a variety of wildlife dependent recreational activities consistent with the Kenai Comprehensive Conservation Plan that are complimentary of other south-central Alaska conservation areas and private providers.
6. Preserve and display examples on the Kenai NWR of historical cabin construction and use from the late 19th and early 20th century.

Public Use Cabins

Public use cabins are those existing structures, so designated, or any newly constructed structures, specifically to be used and enjoyed by the public for overnight accommodations. They will be available for public use year-round (unless closed for maintenance, administrative use, or emergency reasons) and will be available via two management options:

1. **Reservations** - For use by permit and fee only, with advance reservations. Occupancy of public use reservation cabins without a permit will be prohibited. Occasionally the Service may have need of these cabins for official use, and such cabins will have “black-out” dates assigned for official use.
2. **First-Come-First-Served** – For use on a first-come-first-served basis only. Registration for these cabins will be by self-registration at each individual cabin. No permit or fee will be required. Occupants will be required to self-register upon arrival at the cabin, and the cabin registry will be subject to review for compliance. Occasionally the Service may have need of these cabins for official use, and such cabins will be posted in advance of the Service’s intention at least 14 days prior to the use as practicable. Additionally, any first-come-first-served public use cabin may be included in the reservation system after providing adequate public notice to do so. Adequate notice includes posting of the affected cabin(s) prior to the change and publishing a notice in local newspapers (Anchorage, Homer, Kenai/Soldotna, and Seward) in advance of the change.

Additional guidance on the common management of public use cabins include:

- A list of all public use cabins, including classification and procedures for use, will be available at the Refuge Headquarters and on the Refuge Website.

- New cabins, as proposed in this plan, will not be constructed in Kenai NWR Designated Wilderness.
- New construction will be of log design consistent with a general design and dimension to provide comfortable yet rustic lodging, be aesthetically pleasing and blend with the natural landscape, and to conform to the expectations of the visiting public (see Appendix D).
- Registration and accountability for recreational use of public use cabins will be limited to non-commercial users 18 years of age or older. Cabin users may obtain commercial transporter services such as air or water taxis for transportation but may not be accompanied by guides.
- Use of cabins is limited to 7 days regardless of the season. A permit day begins at noon on the assigned day and ends at noon on the following day. Individuals in the same party may not make sequential reservations in order to exceed the nightly stay limit.
- Cabin and other related Refuge regulations will be available from the Refuge office and on the Refuge Website, and posted at each cabin.
- Each cabin will include a table with benches, wood bunk space (without mattresses), wood and/or oil heating stove, axe/maul where appropriate, broom, shovel, water bucket, fire extinguisher, and outhouse. Cabins will not have electricity, bedding, or cooking utensils. Cabin users will need a gas or propane stove for cooking, sleeping bags and pads, pots, cooking and eating utensils, toilet paper, garbage bags, fire starter, water container, and other personal items. Drinking water is not provided.
- Boats and oars may be furnished at selected cabins on certain lakes. Users must provide a U.S. Coast Guard approved flotation device for each passenger aboard the boat, and use boats at their own risk.
- A tent camping restriction will be instituted for persons not staying in the cabin within 600' feet of public use cabins, unless they are members of the party using the cabin.
- Outside campfires will only be authorized in an established fire grate provided by the Refuge. Firewood will generally not be provided at these sites, and the public will be reminded that only dead or down trees may be cut for firewood. Refuge visitors using cabins located in Designated Wilderness are reminded that chain saw use is not allowed.
- All food, garbage and other scented items or personal belongings must be kept secured inside the cabin at all times. Food storage misuse may result in removal from the cabin and/or the Refuge. All food items, garbage, and other personal items must be packed out and not left in the cabin, or cabin area (caching). These restrictions are intended to reduce or eliminate bear/human interactions.
- Some Public Use and Administrative cabins are historical structures and additional stipulations may apply to their use.
- A reservation system, permit and fee required for use, will not be enacted until adequate public notice has been implemented. A notice will be posted on cabins to be included in the reservation system.

Administrative Cabins

Administrative cabins are those existing, or newly constructed structures whose primary use is for administrative purposes. There are two types of administrative cabins, and they will be classified according to the following criteria:

1. **Interpretive** - Those existing structures that have historical significance that will be protected and maintained to provide historic educational interpretation only. These cabins will not be available for overnight use, except in emergencies.
2. **Official Use Only** - Any existing, newly acquired, or newly constructed structures designated for administrative use only, and are not open to the public for overnight accommodation, except in emergencies.

This plan addresses only public use of cabins; therefore administrative cabins maintained primarily for interpretive value are discussed whereas cabins used solely for official use are not included. Interpretive structures to be used for education and interpretation will be maintained so that they do not deteriorate but may not have stoves and may not have bunks, doors, windows, etc. They are to be managed as historical sites.

All structures greater than 50 years of age will be evaluated for eligibility on the National Historic Register, in consultation with the USFWS Alaska Regional Office and the State Historic preservation Officer (SHPO). Structures designated as such will be managed appropriately for such a designation.

Ruins

Ruins are the remains of structures that no longer adequately provide shelter, are deteriorated beyond reasonable repair, and/or may be a safety hazard to the visiting public. Any ruins that are replaced or restored would then be classified as either a public use cabin or an administrative cabin. Many ruins may have historical and archeological significance and will be managed appropriately.

Management Direction of Selected Alternative

1. A Public Use Cabin permit and reservation system will be implemented on all new cabins constructed, including those to be completely replaced whether they are relocated or not. All cabins in existence prior to the initiation of this plan (2004) will be designated as Public Use, First-Come-First-Served (to be used by the public without reservation), or Administrative – Interpretative (Historical).
2. The permit/ reservation system will be conducted via the internet from the Refuge Homepage, and/or from the Refuge Headquarters (via telephone or personally). The reservation system will be administered by Refuge staff.
3. Only individuals with reservations will be allowed to stay in the cabins where reservations are required.

4. Except in emergencies, several administrative/ interpretive (historical) cabins would not be authorized for overnight use, and day visitation would be emphasized.
5. A fee demonstration project would be requested, and funds returned to the Refuge would be used for cabin equipment, maintenance, new construction, and program management.
6. Cabins with wildlife/resource conflicts will be managed to cap or reduce existing use, converted to non-conflict seasonal use, limited administrative use, relocated, or removed.
7. Written guidelines will be established to direct the annual maintenance and administration of all cabins on the Refuge, and these guidelines must conform to the stipulations of this plan.
8. Cabins designated for public use would be renovated or replaced as necessary to achieve an appropriate standard of safety, equipment, and accessibility. If a cabin is replaced, it will be managed under the reservation system and may or may not be replaced at its previous location.
9. Former commercial tent campsites may be converted to public use cabins.
10. A seven-day maximum length of stay will remain in effect. The Refuge reserves the right to adjust length-of-stay requirements to conform to environmental and biological issues.
11. A seasonal backcountry crew and law enforcement officers will monitor cabin use and structural conditions. Maintenance will be scheduled at least twice a year as resources allow.
12. The Refuge would publicize the availability of public use-reservation cabins that are available to the public. Logistical and safety information would be made available to users when reservations are confirmed, or on-site.
13. Cabins eligible for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places will be identified and stabilized as funding allows. Nominations will be completed as time and/or funding allows.
14. Existing cabins, if destroyed, may be replaced or replaced and relocated at the discretion of the Refuge Manager.

Fire Management Categories for Refuge Cabins

1. Cabin visitors may be evacuated in the case of wildfire.
2. Management of both wildfire and prescribed fire will take precedence over protection of these structures to ensure maximum desirable wildlife habitat yield from fire.

Code 1: No protection from wildfire except for “Fire Wise” activities performed prior to a wildfire event.

Code 2: Limited protection from wildfire through the creation of defensible space and minimal protection activities during a wildfire event.

Code 3: Historical structure maximum fire protection under this plan. All reasonable measure will be made to protect structure, including (if available) water pumps, sprinklers, and perhaps foil-wrap.

Cabin Fire Management Categories on the Kenai NWR

<i>Cabin Name</i>	<i>Code</i>	<i>Designation/Use Type</i>
New Cabin	1	Public Use – Reservation
New Cabin	1	Public Use – Reservation
New Cabin	1	Public Use – Reservation
New Cabin	1	Public Use – Reservation
New Cabin	1	Public Use – Reservation
New Cabin	1	Public Use – Reservation
Big Indian Airstrip Cabin	1	Replace/Relocate – Public Use - Reservation
Chickaloon River Cabin	1	Relocate/Relocate – Public Use – Reservation
Enstar / SUP Cabin	2	Replace/Relocate – Public Use - Reservation
Caribou Island Cabin	2	Public Use – Reservation
Doroshin Bay Cabin	2	Public Use – Reservation
Emma Lake Cabin	2	Public Use – First-Come-First-Served
Nurses Cabin	2	Public Use – Reservation
Pipe Creek Cabin	2	Public Use – Reservation
Trapper Joe Cabin	2	Public Use – First-Come-First-Served
Vogel Lake Cabin	2	Public Use – Reservation
Home Cabin	3	Administrative - Interpretive
Andrew Berg Cabin	3	Administrative - Interpretive
Big Bay Cabin	3	Administrative – Interpretive
Harry Johnson Trapping Cabin	3	Administrative – Interpretive
Renfrew Cabin	none	Pending Decision – See Text
Pincher Creek Cabin	1	Remove

SECTION III: AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

Recognized as one of the most popular recreational areas in south-central Alaska, the Kenai NWR's popularity is primarily due to a wide spectrum of outdoor recreation opportunities available, the short distance that separates the Anchorage metropolitan area from Refuge resources, and the ease of accessibility compared to other more remote conservation system areas in Alaska. An estimated 2.5 million people now travel through the Refuge each year with over a half million visitors specifically targeting the Refuge for one or more outdoor-related activities.

Most of what is now the Kenai NWR was originally established as the Kenai National Moose Range in 1941 by President Franklin D. Roosevelt to preserve and maintain the declining moose population on the Kenai Peninsula. Passage of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) in 1980 substantially affected the Moose Range by re-designating it as the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge, adding nearly a quarter million acres, and designating over 1.3 million acres as Wilderness.

"Section 303.4 of ANILCA (1980) sets forth the following major purposes for which the Kenai NWR was established and is to be managed including;

1. To conserve fish and wildlife populations and habitats in their natural diversity including, but not limited to moose, bear, mountain goats, Dall sheep, wolves and other furbearers, salmonids and other fish, waterfowl and other migratory and non-migratory birds;
2. To fulfill the international treaty obligations of the United States with respect to fish and wildlife and their habitats;
3. To ensure, to the maximum extent practicable and in a manner consistent with the purposes set forth in paragraph (i), water quality and necessary water quantity within the Refuge;
4. To provide in a manner consistent with subparagraphs (i) and (ii), opportunities for scientific research, interpretation, environmental education, and land management training; and
5. To provide, in a manner compatible with these purposes, opportunities for fish and wildlife-oriented recreation."

Kenai NWR is situated on the Kenai Peninsula in south-central Alaska and is one of 544 units of the National Wildlife Refuge System managed by the FWS.

SECTION IV: ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

In 1984, The Kenai NWR Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) was developed. The planning process involved several years of data collection and analysis. The general public, and various federal, state and local agencies, participated in the process to help identify issues to be addressed in the plan and provided comments on Service proposals at various times. The final plan was completed and a record of decision was issued in June 1985.

The environmental consequences of this action stated that expanding the capacity of existing facilities would be given funding priority over construction of new facilities so the impacts of intensive recreational use would be localized. Recreation programs would be consistent with emphasizing the Refuge's role in conserving wildlife and providing compatible public enjoyment of wild lands.

In 2003, the public scoping phase of the Kenai CCP began the revision process. Congress stated that each CCP must be revised every 15 years.

Selected Alternative - Alternative C

Newly constructed cabins will be included in the new reservation system, along with those cabins that will be replaced. Five of the seven existing public use cabin will be managed through the reservation system. Up to six new cabins will be constructed in appropriate and attractive non-wilderness locations with minimal access conflicts and maximum wildlife viewing opportunities.

At least half of the new cabins would be located so that access does not require aircraft or extended travel.

Locations of potential new public use cabins on the Kenai NWR

<i>Area To Be Located</i>	<i>Designation</i>
Headquarters Area	Public Use - Reservation
Upper Ohmer Lake	Public Use - Reservation
Snag Lake	Public Use - Reservation
McLain Lake	Public Use - Reservation
Skilak Recreation Area	Public Use - Reservation
Swanson River Area	Public Use - Reservation

A decision on the Renfrew (Lindgren-Darien) Cabin along the Kenai River has been deferred based on discussions with the Kenai Native Association and other interested public. The cabin is a management concern based on numerous issues, including erosion of the riverbank due to people walking up from the river, ATV trespass on the Refuge traveling to the cabin, theft of cultural artifacts, defacto rest stop (sanitation concerns), and high potential for conflicts with brown bears. Alternatives for this cabin are listed below. A specific decision on the management of this structure will be made at a later date.

Listing of Possible Outcomes for the Renfrew (Lindgren-Darien) Cabin

Remain in place	If the cabin remains in place, it will be allowed to deteriorate, and to eventually become a ruin. No repairs will be made.
Restore and move to another more suitable location. May become a public use reservation cabin, or an administrative – interpretative cabin.	Move to Flying Pan Island in Skilak Lake, Upper or Lower Skilak Lake Campground, or other location.
Record and dismantle	Have the cabin recorded for historical purposes, then dismantle.

Management Direction

The advance reservation system will be instituted for select cabin use and a nightly fee charged, and the administrative task of reservations and fee collection will be done by the Refuge. The seven-day length of stay would remain in affect. A seasonal backcountry crew and law enforcement officers will monitor cabin use and condition. Maintenance will be scheduled at least twice a year, as funding permits.

Five of the seven existing public use cabins (see page 4) will be managed under the new reservation system, and the other two will remain available as “first-come-first-serve” public use cabins unless transitioned to a reservation system at a later date after adequate notice. The following cabins will be administered as Administrative – Interpretive historical structures, and

will be managed for day use only: Harry Johnson Trapping Cabin, Home Cabin, Andrew Berg Cabin, and the Big Bay Cabin.

The Refuge will publicize the availability of reservation recreational cabins and provide information about all cabins to prospective users. Logistical and safety information would be sent or given to users when reservations are confirmed. As funding permits, an information brochure on all of the cabins will be produced, and made available to the public.

Cabins eligible for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places will be identified and stabilized, as funding/staff availability allows. Existing trespass, or other cabins not designated for public use or administrative use nor identified as historically significant will not be maintained. They will be removed, if presenting a safety hazard or resource concern, or allowed to deteriorate naturally.

Cabins used for overnight stay will be managed to support wildlife-and wildland-oriented activities. A fee demonstration project will be requested to return user fee dollars to the Refuge for management of the program. Refuge specific guidelines will be established to guide the routine, day-to-day maintenance and administration of Refuge cabin reservations. A permit/reservation cabin program with a user fee and the associated development of management guidelines for Refuge cabins will provide clear direction for cabin use and maintenance. Approved objectives and standards will guide management decisions for new and existing cabins including maintenance, restoration actions, staffing, and budgeting. Refuge staff will be able to respond to inquiries about cabins with much greater clarity and a common sense of purpose.

Implementation of a reservation system on select cabins will assure availability of cabins for those who desire to plan in advance, increase opportunities to inform cabin users about Refuge regulations and minimal impact use, and encourage use by a wider array of people than currently use the cabins on the Refuge. A reservation system on select cabins will facilitate short-term closures of specified cabins for scheduled maintenance or renovation, or when use may conflict with wildlife and habitat conservation.

Cabin use fees will generate some revenue but would not cover the costs of renovating and maintaining cabins, and administering a reservation system (estimated at \$3,000 to \$4,000 per cabin per year). People who pay for use of a cabin generally expect it to be in better condition than when there is no charge. More frequent cabin patrols and responsiveness to maintenance needs will be necessary to satisfy user expectations. Effective implementation of a reservation and fee system will require a comprehensive public information and education effort. Potential users of the reservation cabins will need to be made aware that cabins are available and that a reservation and fee are required.

Upgrading cabins, constructing new cabins, and publicizing their availability for public use is likely to substantially increase cabin use.

Information and enforcement of a "Leave No Trace" policy for litter and proper disposal of wastewater will be necessary to minimize food-conditioning attractants for bears and other

wildlife. Increased harvest of fish and game species (including moose, bear, Dall sheep, and waterfowl) and "defense of life and property" bear kills may be anticipated. Reliance on wood for heating may deplete nearby sources of dead and down wood, leading to increased illegal cutting of standing trees for firewood. Improper disposal of human waste, and/or improper placement of outhouses may affect water quality if adjacent to a stream or lake. Affected wildlife would include birds which nest in snags, small mammals and furbearers, which use logs for cover, and neo-tropical migrants which use shrubs and trees for nesting and feeding. Access to new cabins may increase all of the above-mentioned impacts, as more people use new access points to reach new cabin locations.

Stabilization and protection of cabins identified as eligible for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places will preserve cultural resources that provide a visible remnant of the area's early inhabitants. A comprehensive cabin management program will entail substantially more cost and administrative burden than the current approach but will result in improved facilities and recreation opportunities. Since the demand for recreation cabins is not expected to decline, increases in cabin use and the resulting effects would be long-term in nature. With an information and education component included in the reservation process, a secondary effect of increased cabin use would be a greater awareness of refuge purposes and regulations, which, in turn, may result in better stewardship of refuge resources by cabin users. The Big Indian Airstrip, ENSTAR/SUP, and Chickaloon River cabins will be replaced and moved to drier accessible areas nearby, and will be added to the reservation system after replacement.

Existing and Proposed Cabins (and Approved Use Type) on the Kenai NWR.

<i>Cabin Name</i>	<i>Area Located</i>	<i>Designation</i>
New Cabin	McLean Lake	Public Use – Reservation
New Cabin	Snag Lake	Public Use – Reservation
New Cabin	Lower Ohmer	Public Use – Reservation
New Cabin	Skilak Recreation Area	Public Use – Reservation
New Cabin	Swanson River Area	Public Use – Reservation
New Cabin	Headquarters Area	Public Use – Reservation
Big Indian Airstrip Cabin	Chickaloon/Mystery	Replace/Relocate – Public Use - Reservation
Chickaloon River Cabin	Chickaloon River	Relocate/Relocate – Public Use – Reservation
Enstar / SUP Cabin	Chickaloon/Mystery	Replace/Relocate – Public Use - Reservation
Caribou Island Cabin	Tustumena Lake	Public Use – Reservation
Doroshin Bay Cabin	Skilak Lake	Public Use – Reservation
Emma Lake Cabin	Tustumena Lake	Public Use – First-Come-First-Served
Nurses Cabin	Tustumena Lake	Public Use – Reservation
Pipe Creek Cabin	Tustumena Lake	Public Use – Reservation
Trapper Joe Cabin	Mystery Creek Rd.	Public Use – First-Come-First-Served
Vogel Lake Cabin	Pt. Possession	Public Use – Reservation
Home Cabin	Tustumena Lake	Administrative - Interpretive
Andrew Berg Cabin	Refuge Headquarters	Administrative - Interpretive
Big Bay Cabin	Tustumena Lake	Administrative – Interpretive
Harry Johnson Trapping Cabin	Big Indian Creek	Administrative – Interpretive
Renfrew Cabin	Kenai River	Pending Decision – See Text
Pincher Creek Cabin	Pincher Creek	Remove

Summary of Impacts of Selected Alternatives

Impacts will increase significantly with the adoption of this alternative. Increased use could be expected as information is further disseminated to the public through various channels on the availability of Refuge cabins. Specific impacts are as follows:

Physical Resources (air, soil, water, etc.)

Improper disposal of human waste, and/or improper placement of outhouses may affect water quality if adjacent to a stream or lake. As use from the visiting public increases, impacts to other physical resources would be expected to increase as well. Careful placement of outhouses by Refuge staff will help mitigate this issue.

Biological Resources (Threatened and Endangered species, wildlife, habitat, vegetation)

Since human activity is concentrated in the vicinity of cabins, increased occupancy could result in greater impacts on wildlife and habitats. Information and enforcement of a "Leave No Trace" policy for litter and proper disposal of wastewater would be necessary to minimize food-conditioning attractants for bears and other wildlife. Reliance on wood

for heating could deplete nearby sources of dead and down wood, leading to increased illegal cutting of standing trees for firewood. Affected wildlife would include birds which nest in snags, small mammals and furbearers, which use logs for cover, and neotropical migrants which use shrubs and trees for nesting and feeding. Overall use will increase as the human population increases and knowledge of the availability of the cabins increases.

Cultural Resources

Impacts to cultural resources would be expected to continue at accelerated rates, with occasional disturbance accidentally made; and perhaps rarely intentionally made, by cabin users. Over time, as cabin use increases, impacts to cultural resources will be expected to increase.

Recreation

This alternative would expand opportunities for recreational cabin use with a corresponding increase in impacts to wildlife and habitat. The selected alternative provides for enhanced maintenance, and construction of new public use cabins that will be placed under a reservation system. Additional funding, of a recurring base, will be necessary in order to continue proper management of this cabin management program.

Social or Economic Issues

Positive impacts under this alternative will be significant, with money being spent in the local economy for stabilization, restoration or new construction. Over time, as cabin use increased, the impacts to social or economic issues will increase as air taxi operators become engaged with clients traveling to reservation cabins, etc. The public will also have a greater diversity of choices as opposed to past management.

SECTION V: COMPLIANCE, CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION WITH OTHERS

This draft EA has been intensely reviewed by Kenai NWR personnel, USFWS Regional Office personnel, the State of Alaska, and the general public. The public was consulted in various ways beginning with a questionnaire in May of 2003 published in the Anchorage Daily News, and the Peninsula Clarion, Homer News, Homer Tribune, and the Seward Phoenix Log. Additional public comments were captured during the scoping phase of the Kenai Comprehensive Plan, and through a scoping newsletter mailed in the fall of 2003. Comments were also received during a 30-day comment period on the draft plan, which ran from April 1, 2004 until April 30, 2004, and this input was used to help determine the selected alternative.

Authorities

Authorities and legal mandates for this Environmental Assessment (EA) include the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act, The Refuge Recreation Act, The Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act, The Wilderness Act, The Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA), The National Wildlife Refuge Improvement Act of 1997, and The National Environmental Policy Act.

Guidance for Alaska cabin management can be found in the Code of Federal Regulations (50CFR 36.33) The Refuge Manager may designate government owned cabins as “administrative cabins” that are primarily for management use but that are available to the public for emergencies or for other non-emergency public use on a case-by case basis. The Refuge Manager may also designate government owned cabins as “public use” and establish an allocation system for short-term recreational use.

Select Web Sites That May Be Of Interest To The Public

Kenai National Wildlife refuge: <http://kenai.fws.gov/>

U.S Fish & Wildlife Service – Alaska Regional Homepage: <http://alaska.fws.gov/index.htm>

Code of Federal Regulations: <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/cfr/index.html>

ANILCA: <http://www.r7.fws.gov/asm/anilca/toc.html>

Alaska Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation: <http://www.dnr.state.ak.us/parks/directry.htm>

Alaska Public Lands Information Centers – Cabins: <http://www.nps.gov/aplic/cabins/>

Chugach National Forest: <http://www.fs.fed.us/r10/chugach/>

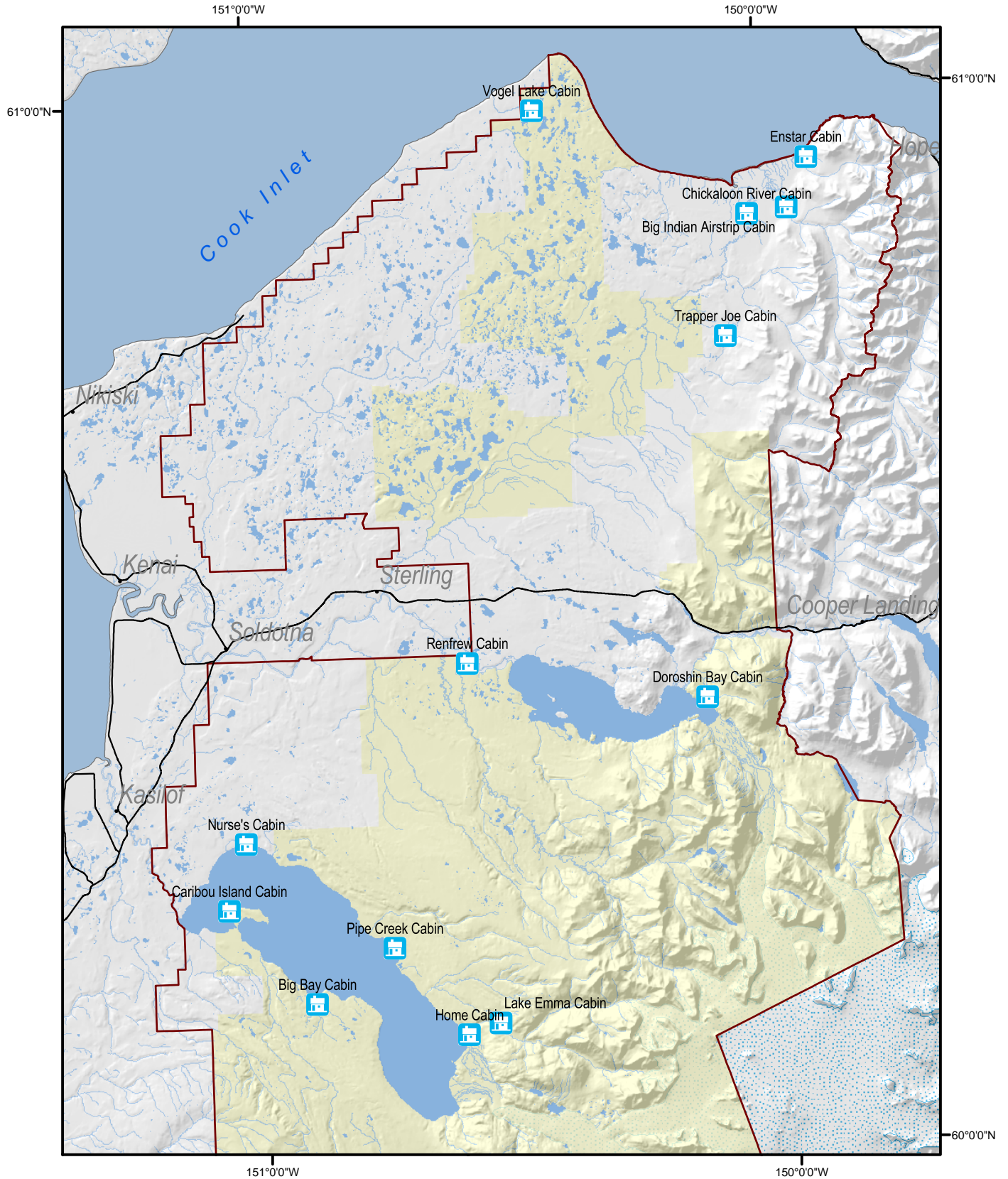


U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Kenai

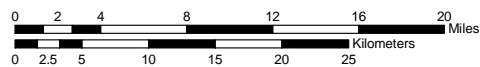
National Wildlife Refuge
Kenai Peninsula, Alaska

Public Use Cabins



PRODUCED BY KENAI NWR GIS
KENAI NWR, ALASKA
BASE MAP DLG
UTM5 NAD83

MAP DATE 03/24/2004



- Cabins
- Kenai NWR Boundary
- Wilderness Areas



Appendix A

Kenai National Wildlife Refuge Cabins History

Early United States Geological Survey maps encompassing Refuge lands depicted numerous cabin sites; documented trapper and user observations also told of certain sites. Pilot observations, law enforcement records, special use permit records, anecdotal information and other records further documented the existence of structures on Refuge lands. Documentation of these cabin sites and related information existed primarily through annual narratives or other internal Refuge documents. Several formal legal actions were conducted in the 1960's to take possession of or force removal of trespass structures. A list of cabins and cabin sites was compiled in approximately 1972 by Refuge staff. The list, which required many later updates and corrections, included location, origin and person(s) associated with the use or construction of the structure. In many instances structures documented on the list were in a state of partial decay.

A more comprehensive inventory entitled, Refuge employee, Dave Kenagy, completed the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge Cabin Inventory in 1984. The inventory included many the structures identified in the 1972 inventory including those that were readily accessible and still used structures. Thirty-five cabins and cabin remains were identified in the 1984 document. The 1984 inventory included name, location, access, construction type, condition, size, resource availability, known impacts, management recommendations, and photograph(s).

Additional cabin sites have been discovered or reported since then, while many of those inventoried in 1984 are no longer standing. Discovery of historical sites, new information about known sites and previously undiscovered trespass structures continues. As of 2003 one hundred-twenty three cabins or their remains have been discovered on the Refuge.

Documented structures exist that are not historical nor seem suitable for public or administrative use. There are also cabins under permit for various purposes such as the cabin and out buildings authorized by permit to the Alaska Department of Fish & Game at Lower Russian Lake to support sport fishing management activities. Non-fisheries use of this research and management cabin is not authorized. There is also an additional cabin established at the Turnagain Arm end of Enstar pipelines to support right-of-way maintenance. The cabin was already constructed at the time these lands transferred from Chugach National Forest in 1980. The cabin has been unofficially available to public use on a first-come/first-serve basis when not in use by ENSTAR.

Since the 1984 inventory, the status of several structures has changed. On a case-by-case basis certain functional cabins have been made available for public use. Maintenance, cleaning, and patrol visits have occurred on an irregular basis. Most of the Refuge cabins identified for public use have received several annual management visits for maintenance and cleaning, while others have only received minimal attention. Providing for cabin associated equipment (i.e. outhouses, lanterns, stoves, saws, bunks, boats, etc. has been accomplished by official action, and unofficial donation. Approved and unapproved volunteers and/or, Refuge staff have provided the labor for various work performed. Funds for materials and equipment have come from both donated and general visitor program appropriated sources.

Other structures including trespass structures not deemed in the best interest of wildlife, Refuge purposes, or that have facilitated inappropriate use of the Refuge, have been allowed to naturally decay and become unusable. Significant natural deterioration has occurred at several structures. Several structures have been damaged or destroyed by cabin users or natural events. A landslide destroyed an older trespass-mining cabin in the fall of 2002 at Indian Creek. Damage has occurred by accident, careless use, and in some instances vandalism. As recently as June 1, 2003, the 50 year old Finger Lakes cabin, originally built to support biological research and more recently one of the Refuges public use cabins, was destroyed by what appears to be careless fire use or arson. The historical and defacto public use cabin known as Frenchy's cabin on the Tustumena Lake shoreline was destroyed by a fire of unknown origins in 1999. A cabin sometimes used by the public known as Cliff House on Tustumena Lake burned in July, 1978.

Refuge wildland fire policy calls for reasonable attempts to protect cabin structures during a wildland fire incident. During the 1990 Pot Hole fire, crews saved the Doroshin Bay cabin from the approaching fire, which burned around and past the cabin location.

Existing structures/cabins vary widely in condition. Many are collapsed or decaying shells unfit for habitation. Some have fallen into disrepair but could be suitable for use with major renovation. A trespass plywood structure at Chickaloon Bay, that has since been removed, was the scene of a tragic fatality due to carbon monoxide poisoning from a homemade heat source. Seven cabins are currently in relatively good condition due to repairs and maintenance by Refuge staff, volunteers, and users. These structures are generally single-room log construction with a wood stove, table, and sleeping platforms. None of the existing cabins were designed or constructed to meet planned visitor use standards, or to duplicate the design, comfort and/or maintenance of pre-planned visitor use cabins typically provided on other federal and state lands.

Inquiries regarding use of cabins have increased through time, and a selected list of cabin locations, access, resources and other related information is available to the general public, entitled Kenai National Wildlife Refuge-Public Use Cabins. More detailed information sheets for each cabin have also been available on request. Refuge cabin information has not been widely distributed. (See Appendix D)

Since 1996, Refuge staff and volunteers have made a concerted effort to identify yet undiscovered historical cabins and cabin sites. Efforts have also been undertaken to locate, identify, examine, stabilize and, in some instances, restore deteriorating historical structures. Several existing public use cabins have historic value and may be eligible for preservation in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act. On a case-by-case basis several historical structures have previously been stabilized and/or restored. Recently, older structures that also have public use interest have received priority for volunteer or Refuge maintenance. Nominations for inclusion of three cabins on the National Register of Historic Places were prepared in 1996. In 1999 one of these historical structures, the Homestead Cabin, was relocated from Tustumena Lake to the Refuge Headquarters for historical preservation and educational one of those, the Home Cabin, had an historical cabin caretaker designated by permit. The permit has since expired, but Refuge stabilization initiatives continue.

The Service currently does not have comprehensive funding to preserve historic structures but there is growing recognition that without immediate restoration or stabilization certain structures will continue to deteriorate. Congress recognized the historic, cultural, and public safety values of cabins on Alaskan refuges in the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA). The Service's cabin management policy for refuges in Alaska states that the Refuge Manager may designate government-owned cabins as public use cabins intended solely for short-term recreational use and occupancy. The Service policy also allows use of an allocation system to manage public use cabins. The Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) Section 1303(b) (1) prohibits private recreation cabins on refuge lands. (This restriction does not apply to privately owned in-holdings within the refuge boundary.)

Guidance for Alaska cabin management is found in the Code of Federal Regulations 50CFR 36.33. This provides the framework for designating administrative or public use cabins. The Refuge Manager may designate administrative cabins that are primarily for management use but that are available for public use for emergencies or for other non-emergency public use on a case-by-case basis. The Refuge Manager may also designate government owned cabins for public use and establish an allocation system for short-term recreational use. New cabins must be compatible with the purposes of Kenai National Wildlife Refuge. Any structure constructed on Federal lands becomes the property of the federal government at the time of construction, and can be either removed or retained by the Refuge for administrative or public use. Removal of excess structures follows procedures established in Title 41, Chapter 114 of the Code of Federal Regulations.

Under certain circumstances, ANILCA includes provisions for previously existing public use cabins to remain in designated Wilderness. In some instances, new public use cabins can be constructed and maintained in designated Wilderness if necessary for health and safety (Section 1315). Generally, permanent structures are not authorized in Wilderness, and congressional notice is required for any new construction or removal of cabins in Wilderness. Cabins within Kenai Wilderness must meet the general objectives for the administration of Alaska Wilderness areas, the Kenai NWR Comprehensive Conservation Plan.

The Refuge Comprehensive Conservation Plan provides the guidance to improve "maintenance of existing cabins for public safety, administration, or recreational needs," and the option to replace them if they are destroyed. Twelve cabins were determined to be useable for public safety and other purposes at the time the Comprehensive Plan was written. Most cabins identified as Public Use cabins are visited by Refuge rangers and inspected and cleaned several times annually by a seasonal back country ranger and Student Conservation Association volunteers. During 2001 and 2002, the Vogel Lake, Emma Lake, Caribou Island, Nurses, Pipe Creek, Moose Creek Sauna structure, and Big Bay cabins received various maintenance including stabilization, log replacement, roofing, interior painting, and other repairs.

During 2003, the Refuge received funding ear-marked for cabin management. As a result of this increased funding the Refuge established a Park Ranger position primarily dedicated to cabin management, continued maintenance, and oversight.

The Refuge has had a basic cabin leaflet available for over fifteen years. Telephone inquiries and visitor center cabin questions are common. Kenai NWR cabins, while popular with many users receive less notoriety by not being on a widely known reservation system. Visitors who inquire about public use cabins are given a list of the general locations and means of access to selected cabins. Information about Kenai NWR cabins and related resources is also available from knowledgeable refuge staff. More recently, the Kenai NWR's web page (<http://kenai.fws.gov/>) provides some cabin information. Several recent articles were written for the popular Refuge Notebook series published by the Peninsula Clarion and are also available on the same web page.

All but one of the public use cabins are located in areas normally accessed by aircraft, powerboat, or snowmobile. Because the cabins cannot be reserved at this time, users generally arrive by their own transportation with alternative equipment and plans should a cabin be occupied. In general, visitors who would have to charter an aircraft or boat to arrive at a remote cabin destination would only do so if they were assured use of the destination cabin. The remoteness, limited information, need for mechanized transportation, and the uncertainty of finding a desired cabin unoccupied have all influenced the character and amount of Kenai NWR cabin use. Cabins have tended to be used most often by knowledgeable local Kenai Peninsula residents and Alaska residents with the local knowledge, alternative overnight plans, and specialized equipment required.

All cabins, found on the Kenai NWR, which will be used for Public Use or Administrative Use under this planning document.

<i>Name</i>	<i>Area Located</i>	<i>Methods of Access</i>	<i>Any Wildlife/Conservation Concerns?</i>	<i>Condition/Capacity</i>
Big Indian Airstrip	Chickaloon/Mystery	A, S, H	Yes	Poor / 4
Caribou Island	Tustumena Lake	B, F, S, T	No	Good / 4
Chickaloon River	Chickaloon River	A, B, F	No	Poor / 6
Doroshin Bay	Skilak Lake	B, F, T	No	Good / 4
Emma Lake	Tustumena Lake	H, T	No	Good / 2
Nurses	Tustumena Lake	B, F, S, T, H	No	Good / 2
Pipe Creek	Tustumena Lake	B, F, S, T, H	No	Good / 3
Trapper Joe	Mystery Creek Rd.	F, S	Yes	Good / 6
Vogel Lake	Pt. Possession	F, S	Yes	Good / 4
Enstar / SUP	Chickaloon/Mystery	A, V, S (4x4)	No	Fair / 4
Home Cabin	Tustumena Lake	B, F, S, T	Yes	Good / ?
Renfrew	Kenai River	B, T	Yes	Poor / ?
Big Bay	Tustumena Lake	B, F, S, T	Yes	Poor / ?
Andrew Berg	Refuge Headquarters	V	No	Excellent / 0
Harry Johnson Trapping Cabin	Big Indian Creek	H, S, T	No	Poor / 2

Access: A = Wheeled Aircraft
 B = Powerboat
 F = Floatplane/skiplane
 H = Horse

S = Snowmachine
 V = Highway Vehicle (4X4)
 Licensed vehicle required (4X4 required) (Aug. 20 – Oct 20 Only)
 T = Trail, Hiking, Skiing

Notes:

1. Enstar/SUP cabin has historically been permitted for use via a Refuge special use permit, but has been unofficially available to the public.
2. Big Indian, Caribou Island, Emma Lake, Nurses and Pipe Creek cabins are all located in Designated Wilderness.

Historically, users who frequent a particular cabin have developed a fondness, as evidenced by repeated trips, donated equipment, unofficial improvements and repairs, equipment caching, and firewood stockpiling. While the maintenance of several Refuge cabins can be credited to certain users, their frequent use and personal belongings sometimes give the impression that the cabin is less available for public use. Well-intended repairs such as exterior painting of log structures have inadvertently accelerated decay on two cabins. Certain cabins, particularly those on Tustumena Lake, have been used as winter trapping headquarters for longer periods of time than the currently published 7-day cabin use time period. Refuge regulations restrict cabin stays to no more than seven consecutive days and personal property cannot be left unattended longer than 72 hours. The November 10 through February 28 trapping season does not generally conflict with high use periods but unauthorized long-term use has been problematic in several instances. Law enforcement and backcountry patrols have promoted generally good compliance with length of stay regulations. Average stays, as reported in cabin logs, appear to be 1-2 nights.

The Service constructed none of the existing cabins designated for potential public use, and most have not been fully evaluated as to how they meet mandated refuge purposes, particularly the potential for impacting wildlife populations and habitat. In the past, many of the structures have

been attractive sites for vandalism and other behavior related violations, as well as the site and accommodation of choice for persons involved in wildlife and public use violations. Since many of the cabins were originally built to support hunting and trapping activity or popular routes of travel, most are in remote areas with significant wildlife habitat values in close proximity. Hunters and fisherman, and to a lesser extent trappers, constitute a significant proportion of current Refuge cabin users.

Refuge wildlife management policy requires suspension of aircraft operations on lakes with nesting Trumpeter Swans that would otherwise be open. At least two cabins (Vogel and Trapper Joe) are located on lakes in known Trumpeter Swan nesting territories and are subject to aircraft access suspension during nesting activities.

Note: Appendix B contains a description, and if available a photo, of each of the cabins currently available for public use and/or being evaluated in this plan.

Existing programs in South-central Alaska

There are currently over 80 recreational public use cabins located in the south central portion of Alaska including southeast, the Matanuska-Susitna Valley, Kenai Peninsula, Prince William Sound and Kodiak Island. The U.S. Forest Service is the largest cabin owner by far, providing 42 permit/reservation cabins throughout the Chugach NF. The Fish & Wildlife Service has another seven cabins on Kodiak Island, which, like those of the USFS, are maintained on a reservation basis. Alaska State Parks, Department of Natural Resources (DNR) operates 38 reservation cabins in south central Alaska including 12 in the Kenai Area, and 26 in Matsu, Yakutat, and Kodiak Areas. Transportation hubs for these DNR cabins are Anchorage and the Kenai Peninsula. Kenai Fjords National Park has four cabins available by reservation. Several of these conservation areas also have other structures not on their reservation system such as the three climbing huts available along the Eklutna Traverse within Chugach State Park.

There are also numerous remote cabins and shelter structures available for reservation and rent from native corporations and private owners including several on remote in-holdings within federal and state conservation system units in south-central Alaska. Private remote cabin or shelter reservations and fees vary depending on the location and private marketing plan. Private remote cabin reservation and pricing policies vary, however one inholding within Lake Clark National Park charges \$300.00/night, accommodates six and is booked approximately 80 nights annually. Private remote cabins tend to provide additional amenities compared to public cabins.

Air taxis on the Kenai Peninsula and Anchorage serve a vast territory including remote lands that have cabins and shelters throughout south central Alaska. An estimate of available remote accommodations is not centrally available but would likely exceed 100 cabins or shelters.

In a related and long established special use permit program, Kenai NWR has authorized air taxis to construct and manage semi-permanent tent shelters at remote fly in lakes. The program has operated since the early 1960's. Only a few shelters remain in the program. Over the past ten

years, an average of ten camps have been available to visitors via air taxis special use permits for fly-out packages. Accommodations, equipment, and amenities at these remote shelter structures are comparable to those of cabins available at Chugach National Forest (Chugach NF), Kodiak Refuge, and Alaska State Park (Alaska SP) cabins including established shelter at a remote site, bunks, cook stove, boats, sport fishing opportunity, and wildlife. Fee structures and reservations have been handled by permitted air taxis. Due to the sale and/or closure of several air taxi businesses, the number of available camps has decreased significantly in recent years. For the 2003 season, only two camps remain under special use permit.

Several other Kenai NWR special use permittees provide for overnight cabin accommodations on private inholdings associated with their primary permitted activities.

The fee for Chugach NF cabins range from \$25.00 to \$45.00 a night plus an \$8.00 reservation fee; maximum stay is 7 nights. Advanced reservations are made via a nationally administered contract reservation clearing house through an 800 telephone number or the internet. The program is a Federal Fee Demonstration project with user fees returned to the Forest Service for program administration and maintenance. Cabins can be booked 180 days in advance and use of cabins without a reservation is a public use regulations violation. The Chugach NF is currently evaluating adding 3-5 new cabins. Occupancy ranges from nearly 40-100% year around occupancy at popular public use cabins. Kenai Peninsula cabins have over a 90% occupancy Memorial Day through September. Most Chugach NF public use cabins have been constructed from cabin kits. Including materials, transport to remote sites, and labor, initial cost is approximately \$60,000 per cabin, depending on the site. Chugach also has several cabins similar to Kenai NWR's that have origins other than agency construction available for public use.

Nineteen of the Chugach NF and Alaska SP reservation cabins are located on the Kenai Peninsula. Two Chugach NF public use cabins are located on Upper and Lower Russian Lakes respectively, and have a shared boundary with Kenai NWR. Cabin users have boats and access to Kenai NWR waters and shoreline within a short walking distance to the Refuge. Two other Chugach NF cabins are located in close proximity to the Refuge boundary, including the Aspen Flats Cabin located along the Upper Russian River. The mid stream of the Russian River is the Chugach NF-Kenai NWR boundary.

Although maintenance and cabin monitoring takes place at local district offices, Alaska SP utilizes an Anchorage based central reservation office and has guidelines for advanced cabin bookings.

There is no doubt that recreational cabins and shelters are popular. Several statewide surveys for the Alaska Outdoor Recreation Plan revealed the major preference for new state facilities was public recreation cabins. Several conservation system planning efforts including the Kenai NWR CCP and subsequent public use plan initiatives identified visitor interest in remote cabins.

Within the US Fish and Wildlife Service in Alaska, only Kodiak NWR has a formalized cabin reservation program. Seven public use cabins are maintained on refuge lands and a

reservation/permit system has been in place for over 20 years. Kodiak NWR holds drawings and books reservation at their Kodiak office. Kodiak NWR user permit fee is \$20.00/night. A quarterly drawing on a first-come-first-served basis following the lottery reserves cabins. Length of stay is variable, seasonally ranging from 7 to 15 days.

The Tetlin NWR has several administrative cabins that are also available for non-reservation public use. Tetlin's program most nearly duplicates Kenai's cabin program.

The Kenai NWR program is unique in comparison to other south-central Alaska cabin programs. While there may be defacto cabins or remote structures that are used by the public, Kenai NWR alone has an established public use cabin program available free of charge on a first-come-first-serve basis. Estimated overnight use of Kenai NWR's cabins varies from less than 10 nights of occupancy for some cabins to over 100 use nights. Day use and historical observation visits are unknown; however, based on staff observations and cabin logs, this use would nearly equal overnight use visits at certain cabins.

Appendix B

Caribou Island Cabin



Kenai National Wildlife Refuge

Location: Caribou Island on Tustumena Lake. USGS map: Kenai A-3, T2N, R10W, Section 29

Prior to the creation of the Kenai NWR in 1941, cabins were built by miners, trappers, and hunting guides. Today, these cabins are open to the public.

Description: A 14' X 17', one-story log cabin consisting of a single rectangular room.

Access: Primary access to this cabin is by powerboat, floatplane and snowmachine.

Accommodation: The maximum group size for the cabin is 4 people.

Recreational Activities: Hunting, fishing, hiking, sightseeing, wildlife viewing, and exploring.

Hazards: The shore is exposed to southerly winds; large waves could swamp boats not pulled out on the beach; there is little beach area available during high water.

Doroshin Bay Cabin



Kenai National Wildlife Refuge

Location: East end of Skilak Lake in Doroshin Bay. USGS map: Kenai B-1, T4N, R5W, Section 22

Prior to the creation of the Kenai NWR in 1941, cabins were built by miners, trappers, and hunting guides. Today, these cabins are open to the public.

Description: A 14' x 16' one-story log cabin consisting of a single rectangular room.

Access: Primary access to this cabin is by powerboat, floatplane and snowmachine.

Accommodation: The maximum group size for the cabin is 4 people.

Recreational Activities: Hunting, fishing, hiking, sightseeing, wildlife viewing, and exploring.

Hazards: The shore is exposed to southerly winds; large waves could swamp boats not pulled out on the beach; there is little beach area available during high water. Large, submerged rocks near shore present a hazard to approaching boats and floatplanes.

Emma Lake Cabin



Kenai National Wildlife Refuge

LOCATION: South shore of Emma Lake. USGS map: Kenai A-2, T1S, R7W, Section 6

Prior to the creation of the Kenai NWR in 1941, cabins were built by miners, trappers, and hunting guides. Today, these cabins are open to the public.

Description: A 12' x 12' one-story log cabin consisting of a single room.

Access: Primary access to this cabin is by hiking from Tustumena Lake. Floatplane landing on Lake Emma is prohibited.

Accommodation: The maximum group size for the cabin is 4 people.

Recreational Activities: Hunting, fishing, hiking, sightseeing, wildlife viewing, and exploring.

Hazards: Brown and black bear are common in the area.

Nurses Cabin



Kenai National Wildlife Refuge

Location: Northeast shore of Tustumena Lake.

Prior to the creation of the Kenai NWR in 1941, cabins were built by miners, trappers, and hunting guides. Today, these cabins are open to the public.

Description: A 12' x 14' one-story log cabin consisting of a single rectangular room.

Access: Primary access to this cabin is by hiking, powerboat, floatplane and snowmachine.

Accommodation: The maximum group size for the cabin is 4 people.

Recreational Activities: Hunting, fishing, hiking, sightseeing, wildlife viewing, and exploring.

Hazards: The shore is exposed to southwesterly winds; large waves could swamp boats not pulled out on the beach; there is little beach area available during high water. Large, submerged rocks near shore present a hazard to approaching boats and floatplanes.

Pipe Creek Cabin



Kenai National Wildlife Refuge

Location: Northeast shore of Tustumena Lake on Pipe Creek. USGS map: Kenai A-3, T1N, R9W, Section 12

Prior to the creation of the Kenai NWR in 1941, cabins were built by miners, trappers, and hunting guides. Today, these cabins are open to the public.

Description: A 12' x 15' one-story log cabin consisting of a single rectangular room.

Access: Primary access to this cabin is by powerboat, floatplane and snowmachine.

Accommodation: The maximum group size for the cabin is 4 people.

Recreational Activities: Hunting, fishing, hiking, sightseeing, wildlife viewing, and exploring.

Hazards: The shore is exposed to southwesterly winds; large waves could swamp boats not pulled out on the beach. Bears frequent the area during summer months.

Trapper Joe Lake Cabin



Kenai National Wildlife Refuge

Location: North end of Trapper Joe Lake. USGS map: Kenai D-1, T8N, R5W, Section 24

Prior to the creation of the Kenai NWR in 1941, cabins were built by miners, trappers, and hunting guides. Today, these cabins are open to the public.

Description: A 12 x 14 one-story log cabin consisting of a single rectangular room.

Access: Primary access to this cabin is by floatplane and snowmachine.

Accommodation: The maximum group size for the cabin is 4 people.

Recreational Activities: Hunting, fishing, hiking, sightseeing, wildlife viewing, and exploring.

Hazards: Brown and black bear frequent the area.

Vogel Lake Cabin



Kenai National Wildlife Refuge

Location: South shore of Vogel Lake. USGS map: Kenai D-2, T10N, R7W, Section 1

Prior to the creation of the Kenai NWR in 1941, cabins were built by miners, trappers, and hunting guides. Today, these cabins are open to the public.

Description: A large one-story log cabin.

Access: Primary access to this cabin is by floatplane and snowmachine.

Accommodation: The maximum group size for the cabin is 4-6 people.

Recreational Activities: Hunting, fishing, hiking, sightseeing, wildlife viewing, and exploring.

Hazards: None.

Appendix C

Kenai National Wildlife Refuge Cabins

The Kenai National Wildlife Refuge is in the process of developing a cabin management plan. We are asking for your comments regarding current usage and management priorities, as well as your suggestions as to the manner in which cabin use will be managed in the future.

Cabins on refuge land vary widely in history and condition. Most are unfit for any but emergency use, while others have fallen into disrepair but could be suitable for general public use after major renovation. Some cabins are in relatively good condition due to irregular repairs and maintenance by refuge staff, volunteers and users.

Generally, these cabins are single room structures with, at most, a wood stove, table and sleeping platforms. None were designed or constructed to meet recognized safety and accessibility standards, nor do they offer the amenities or level of comfort provided by structures built specifically for public use on other public lands. Some cabins may have historic value and, indeed, be eligible for preservation in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act. However, the Refuge does not have funding available to restore them, and without restoration or stabilization these cabins will eventually deteriorate to a point where they are unsalvageable.

The proposed cabin management plan will address the maintenance needs of usable cabins, the potential for restoration of historic cabins and the possible need for the construction of additional structures. In addition, it should address the feasibility of establishing a reservation system for one or more of these structures.

The staff of Kenai National Wildlife Refuge is asking your help in shaping this cabin management plan.

Please respond to the questions below and return the form to:

Kenai National Wildlife Refuge
P.O. Box 2139
Soldotna, Alaska 99669

For more information, and to obtain a response form by mail, contact Kenai Refuge Headquarters at (907) 262-7021. The response form is also available:

- In person, at Refuge Headquarters, located on Ski Hill Road in Soldotna, AK

and

- On the Internet at: <http://kenai.fws.gov>

KENAI NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

Have you ever used a cabin on Kenai National Wildlife Refuge?

☐ YES ☐ NO

Do you think the number of cabins available is?

☐ about right? ☐ too many? ☐ too few?

Do you think one or more cabins should be on a reservation system, so that some visitors could arrange exclusive use of a particular cabin on a specific date?

☐ YES ☐ NO

If you responded, "Yes" to the question above, do you think the cabin management program would be administered best by?

☐ Refuge staff ☐ Concessionaire

Other comments or suggestions?

Please return this form to:

Kenai National Wildlife Refuge
P.O. Box 2139
Soldotna, Alaska 99669

Responses:**Kenai NWR Cabin Questionnaire – 23 responses**

Have you ever used a cabin on KNWR?	YES - 14 “multiple times”	NO - 9 “Didn’t know about them”	
Do you think the number of cabins is:	About right - 6	Too many	Too few - 16
Do you think one or more cabins should be on a reservation system, so that some visitors could arrange exclusive use of a particular cabin on a specific date?	Yes - 18 “or publicized” “either”	No - 5	
If you responded “yes” to the question above, do you think the cabin management program would be administered best by:	Refuge Staff - 8	Concessionaire - 9	

Other comments or suggestions?

- “Keep it a backcountry system, especially in the Wilderness Area. Do not commercialize it or put \$ into the use. These can be “life saving” cabins.”
- “I have never used a USFWS cabin because I can’t reserve it in advance. I don’t want to fly or boat to a cabin without knowing I’ll be able to use it. I am an avid user of USFS cabins. I’d love to be able to use USFWS cabins in the same way.”
- “If I want to reserve a cabin I can go next door & reserve a FS cabin. I really enjoy having ‘spur of the moment’ cabins also available. Mostly I use those cabins on the northern Kenai. I especially enjoy Trapper Joe.”
- “Put more and better maintained boats on popular fishing lakes”
- “My indication of (concessionaire) is due to wondering about impact of additional duties on current staff. It may be more cost effective to contract out ~ a self-employed contract wouldn’t have staffing costs like a government program. Thank you for the opportunity to include feedback.”
- “Does Habitat for Humanity have resources and people to assist you or churches to have talents to help your maintenance?”
- “Build more cabins in various areas along the Seward and Sterling Highways all the way to Homer. Build more practical usable cabins with the Kenai River confluences close to fishing. If you only have 10 or less cabins in limited areas you might as well just shut it down.”
- “I have managed, built & constructed public use cabins for the state. I have strong interest in backcountry cabin management.”
- “I would like to see a series of cabins that could be hiked or canoed to, with a reservation system similar to the National Forest & State Park cabin system”
- “Could you please send me all listings of cabins and locations of them on the refuge to: _____.”
- “Protect our Wildlife Refuges Keep up the great work! Have a great day! “
- “The Kenai NWR is not a State or Federal Park, it should remain focused on Wildlife not Recreation.”
- “Leave the cabins alone! They belong to the public. Let them take care of them or destroy them.”
- “Expand trail use to include mountain. bikes; open Mystery Creek Road more often/year-round. You folks do a good job, fyi. Please send news and information on this and other issues to Coast magazine, in care of this email address.”
- “Our family uses the cabins in both State parks and the National Forest. We find them very accessible and affordable. Yet the wildlife Refuge Cabins seem obscure and hard to find. It would be great to have a detailed listing and be able to reserve them via ReserveUsa. We have used them extensively and have had no problems with them other than they are on the east coast.... Which means and early rise to get that special cabin.”
- “I do not believe this use is compatible or appropriate for the Kenai Refuge. The money that is used to maintain this program could go to other better programs for visitor use or even biology studies.”

- “Thanks so much for the opportunity to voice an opinion concerning the cabins on the refuge. I have spent many winter nights in several of the cabins with my Boy Scout troop. It is really nice that they have not been torn down. I agree that they need some sort of management or at least someone to put these cabins under a loving wing. Over the years I have seen some of the cabins go from bad to better and from better to worse in some cases. It really hurts when you show up to camp and the windows are shot out or the door pulled from the hinges and the rowboat at Finger Lakes shot full of holes from vandals. On the other hand I have seen the Doroshin bay cabin get better in time. And someone put a little effort into making it worth staying at. Personally I feel the cabins should be maintained with donations and work parties. Cooperation with Scout troops in our area would be a great idea. This could become an Eagle Scout project for several young Men. I know that personally our family would be willing to adopt one of the cabins. Thinking about the idea of reservations is another idea I like. In the past we have shared a cabin with folks that showed up after we had already arrived and we welcomed them in. They had the same idea we did and took a gamble that no one would be at the cabin... We always bring along a tent in the event someone is already in the cabin but it would be nice to not have to fret about it and know you have it for a couple of nights. I can see that the future of the cabins is only certain if either the Refuge decides to maintain them and rent them out or they Concessionaire them out on a yearly basis. I truly believe that our refuge does a great job of maintaining its facilities, but farming out services to private companies does not always give you better management. We have seen in the lower 48 good public campgrounds ran by the states and feds. go bad in a short time when leased out to private concessions. I truly believe you guys need to keep a strong hand in any cooperative that comes up concerning any of our Federal lands. Maybe we need someone to right a grant for the cabins that have historical value. After you gather your public information on this subject I would be happy to sit on a task force or board. Thanks again.

Appendix D

